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Department of State TELEGRAM

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-06 H-02 INR-06 L-03 NSAE-00
NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14 USIA-12 UPW-01 IO-11
RSR-01 /086 W
107278

R 241120Z SEP 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0369
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 1/26/82
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
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ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
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PA OF FOI EXEMPTIONS

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SUBJ: VIEWS OF UPPER HOUSE CHAIRMAN ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: A. SAIGON 15243 B. SAIGON 15244 C. SAIGON 15314 D. SAIGON 15379

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

1. SUMMARY. CHAIRMAN NGUYEN VAN HUYEN TOLD EMBOFF SEPTEMBER 24 THAT PROCLAMATION ISSUED TWO DAYS EARLIER BY UPPER HOUSE WAS PASSED BECAUSE SENATORS FELT THEY HAD "OBLIGATION" TO EXPRESS POPULAR WILL AND DESPITE PROBABILITY THAT PRESIDENT THIEU WOULD REJECT IT. HUYEN FEARED EROSION OF THIEU'S AUTHORITY IF HE PERSISTED IN ONE-MAN ELECTION, THOUGH HE SAW LITTLE PROSPECT OF A SOLUTION WHICH THIEU WOULD ACCEPT. DENYING FORCEFULLY THAT HE WISHED TO REPLACE THIEU NO MATTER HOW TEMPORARILY, HUYEN ALSO SAID HE WAS "HESITATING" OVER WHETHER TO RUN FOR REELECTION AS UPPER HOUSE CHAIRMAN NEXT MONTH. END SUMMARY.

2. CHAIRMAN HUEYN CHARACTERIZED PROCLAMATION JUST PASSED BY UPPER HOUSE (REFS A AND B) AS "OBLIGATION"

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OF LEGISLATORS TO EXPRESS PUBLIC SENTIMENT AND SAID THAT SENATORS TOOK THIS ACTION DESPITE LIKELIHOOD THAT THIEU WOULD NOT ACCEPT REORGANIZATION OF ELECTION. HUYEN NOTED THAT EVEN PRO-EXECUTIVE SENATORS SUPPORTED PROCLAMATION, AND HE WAS SURE THAT IF FAITHFULLY REFLECTED THE POPULAR WILL. HUYEN REGRETTED SEPTEMBER 23 COMMUNIQUE OF CABINET ON PROCLAMATION (REF D), WHICH THREE ISSUE BACK TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HE SAID THAT THIEU KNEW ASSEMBLY WOULD NOT ACT BEFORE OCTOBER 3 AND THUS, IN EFFECT, WAS REJECTING PROCLAMATION.

3. HUYEN EMPHASIZED THAT THE UPPER HOUSE DID NOT WISH TO CHANGE ANYTHING FUNDAMENTAL IN THE ELECTION AND MERELY WANTED A "REGULAR ELECTION" TO REPLACE THE CURRENT ONE-MAN RACE. HE FEARED THAT THIEU'S AUTHORITY WOULD BE SERIOUSLY ERODED AFTER OCTOBER 3 IFTHE CURRENTLY PLANNED REFERENDUM IS HELD, FORCING HIM TO GOVERN THROUGH FORCE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN THE STANDING OF THE PRESIDENT, HUYEN BELIEVED, BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND VIS-A-VIS THE VIET CONG. THEN AND IF REAL NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN IN PARIS, PRESIDENT MU. SPEAK WITH "REAL AUTHORITY" AS REPRESENTATIVE OF PEOPLE.

4. HUYEN STATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE DID NOT WISH TO REPLACE THIEU AS PRESIDENT "FOR EVEN A FEW DAYS, LET ALONE THREE MONTHS." THE PROSPECT WAS A "NIGHTMARE" TO HIM. IN HIS VIEW, THIEU WAS THE BEST LEADER FOR THE COUNTRY. THE SOLE PROBLEM IS NOW TO MAINTAIN THIEU'S MORAL AUTHORITY. HUYEN'S PREFERRED SOLUTION IS TO POSTPONE THE ELECTION FOR NO MORE THAN SEVERAL WEEKS, RESCHEDULING IT SOMETIME BEFORE OCTOBER 31 SO THAT THIEU WILL STILL BE PRESIDENT. IN THOSE WEEKS, THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD ACT FAST TO PASS A NEW ELECTION LAW WITH A LIBERALIZED ENDORSEMENT PROVISION. HOWEVER, HUYEN WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS SOLUTION COULD BE BROUGHT ABOUT.

5. CONCERNING MEASURES THIEU COULD TAKE AFTER THE OCTOBER 3 REFERENDUM VICTORY THAT WOULD CALM OPPOSITION, HUYEN REFERRED TO SENATOR DAN VAN SUNG'S IDEA THAT THIEU SHOULD ANNOUNCE INTENTION TO RESIGN IN MARCH 1972. HUYEN DID NOT FAVOR THIS PROPOSAL, BUT HE THOUGHT IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN RESERVE IN CASE ALL ELSE FAILS. AT LEAST IT WOULD PROVIDE A "PERIOD OF DETENTE." BUT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THIEU WOULD

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ACCEPT THIS SUGGESTION EITHER.

6. WHEN ASKED IF HE PLANNED TO BE A CANDIDATE FOR REELECTION AS UPPER HOUSE CHAIRMAN NEXT MONTH, HUYEN (WHOSE HEALTH LOOKS GOOD) ANSWERED THAT HE WAS "HESITATING" AND HAD NOT YET REACHED A DECISION.

7. COMMENTING BRIEFLY ON HIS SEPTEMBER 22 TELEVISION READING OF THE UPPER HOUSE PROCLAMATION (REF C), HUYEN REVEALED THAT AT FIRST HE HAD FEARED HE MIGHT NOT RECEIVE PERMISSION TO APPEAR. HOWEVER, THE TELEVISION AUTHORITIES HAD BEEN "CORRECT" AND HAD CAUSED HIM NO PROBLEMS.

8. COMMENT: THE CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS PARALLEL THOSE HEARD OFTEN IN SAIGON THESE DAYS DEPLORING ELECTION SITUATION BUT NOT SEEING ANY CLEAR, PRACTICABLE PATH OUT OF THE IMPASSE. HIS DENIAL THAT HE WISHED TO TAKE OVER PRESIDENTIAL POWERS WAS MADE WITH SUCH UNCHARACTERISTIC FORCE THAT ONE IS COMPELLED TO BELIEVE HE IS DISMAYED AT THE PROSPECT.
BUNKER